



Middlesex University Research Repository

An open access repository of
Middlesex University research

<http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk>

Gibbs, Paul (2016) Should contentment be a key aim in higher education? Educational Philosophy and Theory . ISSN 0013-1857
(Published online first)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1214898>

Final accepted version (with author's formatting)

Available from Middlesex University's Research Repository at
<http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/19087/>

Copyright:

Middlesex University Research Repository makes the University's research available electronically.

Copyright and moral rights to this thesis/research project are retained by the author and/or other copyright owners. The work is supplied on the understanding that any use for commercial gain is strictly forbidden. A copy may be downloaded for personal, non-commercial, research or study without prior permission and without charge. Any use of the thesis/research project for private study or research must be properly acknowledged with reference to the work's full bibliographic details.

This thesis/research project may not be reproduced in any format or medium, or extensive quotations taken from it, or its content changed in any way, without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s).

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Middlesex University via the following email address:

eprints@mdx.ac.uk

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated.

Should Contentment be a Key Aim in Higher Education?

nsumer

Abstract

Higher education institutions are major concentrations of political, social, economic, intellectual and communicative resources. They reach freely across populations and cultures, and connect to government, professions, industry and the arts. The neo-liberal logic of markets has entered the realm of (higher) education. Marketing functions centre on the creation, codification and transmission of knowledge, and the certification of graduates and the nature of education are commercialised, both in provision and in curriculum content. This leads to discourse on the benefits of education being positioned almost exclusively in terms of their effect on income.

The perspective taken in the paper is the development of a happiness motive which asks education to challenge what it is to be a member of society: what moral and ontological stance one will seek to take in developing one's future. The satisfied student perpetuates the current lifeworld in which they find themselves, seeking to improve the quality of the services provided. It is proposed that an overly-emphasised desire-satisfaction culture inhibits the edifying mission of universities. This is not to argue against high quality service provision but to differentiate it from the edifying role of personal challenge, determination and social responsibility conceptualised here as profound happiness or contentment, and the university's role in its development. It calls for a different and more refreshing approach to higher education, which is losing its shape and 'morphing' into socially-experienced training provision

Keywords: Heidegger, contentment, higher education

Introduction

The notion that education is the provision of intellectual and emotional desire satisfaction has tended to become a driver of university strategy, reflecting how institutionalised education (in some, but by no means all cases) has been interpreted in this consumerist epoch. Roberts (2013) writes that education now seems actually to be about promoting desire satisfaction, often in ways that are not implicit for education but that create

pleasurable and measurable experiences. It is this shift of emphasis from the nature of edification which might be pleasurable to where the edifying experiences are required to be pleasures is a significant change in educational policy. Moreover, the effects of this change is compounded as what is taken as pleasurable is that which satisfies certain desired attributes of the input processes of being educated not in the more ontologically difficult notion of learning as becoming. These inputs and the level of their satisfactory delivery prove conducive to be measured and measured they must to justify the returns on the investment made in them both by the students and others in the education process. The value for money imperative has led to the fetish of unquestioned metrics which prompts simple comparisons of the complex that lead to the invasion of pedagogical policy and practice. Satisfaction metrics are used to build reputation, inform educational policy and create conformity. Moreover, they represent an agenda for desire satisfaction that is an extravagant, imagined sea of opportunity (favoured by advocates of education as a means to an end through accreditation which increases social capital through levels of employment) and not one where a tempering of achievement is obtained through balancing capabilities and potentiality. Indeed, the current context of education seems to emphasise anxiety of failure in getting right job and income and thus fear and dissonance for one's decisions about one's future.

This paper considers higher education from an alternative perceptive of contentment and tries to develop a clarity between that and happiness and desire satisfaction. Such clarity is needed as the terms are often conflated leading to confusion in practice. I seek to do this by reference to Heidegger and especially to his distinction between emotions (in my terms; happiness, joy) which are brief and transitory and moods (contentment, anxiety) which are fundamental and reveal the world to use. These of course intermingle but are distinctive in their temporal relevance.

The notion of happiness, satisfaction contentment

The etymology of the terms shows a closeness and interrelationship between all three terms being contented, satisfied and happy. Indeed it seems that the dominate term is happiness for it can act as meaning giving in a number of ways. Indeed the literature often uses happiness as a prefix to discussing desire satisfaction and contentment. however in this paper I want to deliberately hold them apart albeit for the time being under the rubric of happiness. I will suggest that in education the dominate idea of happiness is one of rationale self-interest and contrast this with notion of happiness that of first desire preference satisfaction and thirdly emotional. I then develop a notion of emotional happiness which is

based on the temporality of emotions and moods found in Heidegger to argue for a distinction between happiness and contentment and then develop an argument why contentment ought to be an educational goal whilst not dismissing the other form of happiness

The Rational

The educational philosopher Dearden points out that 'education may be broadly defined as the process of learning through which we come to an understanding and appreciation of what is valuable or worth pursuing in life, and happiness is no more than one among several final ends worthy of pursuit' (1968: 27). However, what is meant by happiness? Briefly Dearden's contribution follows the Aristotelian prescription of well-being (1984) that shares the focus on the distinctive human attributes of rationality and desire found in Augustine (2010), Epicurus (2013) and, more recently, Mill (2008), Russell (2006), Dewey (2012), Noddings (2003), Standish, Smeyers and Smith (2006), Dewey (1966), Haybron, (2009), White (2012) and Greve (2012). These ideas assume the socially good person to be a happy person as no rational person would make choices that were against their own happiness and this, of course, is contestable. It is countered by Kant's argument that happiness cannot be a final end in itself, hinging on the observation that, although we are naturally drawn to our own happiness, such a drive is not necessarily mediated through reason (and, through reason, to duty). What might the other mediating forces be? For argument sake I have considered them as forces that satisfy desire preferences and moods and emotions.

Desire satisfaction

The notion of what might be called desire theories of happiness depends on identifying preferences. The degree to which these are satisfied determines a level of happiness (Sumner, 1999). Clearly, these preferences can be base or cultured, rich or superficial, and share a desire in utility to prevent pain and enhance pleasure. Their commonality is in hedonism, informed (having an appreciation of the nature of the objects of desire and its prudential impact (Griffin, 1988) or doxic. Their satisfaction can be achieved by a confluence of concepts that produce occurrent enjoyment or dispositional happiness (Davis, 1981; Haybron, 2009). Such desires tend to be informed by experience and the expectations of others, and reflective of the world in which one operates. Moreover, given the fragility and susceptibility of desires over time, they tend not to have any basis on which to judge happiness; although they offer an explanation of certain, often instrumental behaviours, these are not necessarily the emotions that accompany their achievement. Furthermore, there have been sustained critiques of these theories on the premise that one

might either remain unhappy if one's desires are met, or be happy even when one desires fail to be met (Feldman, 2012).

Indeed, as Sumner points out, 'enjoyment and suffering always require intentional objects, feelings of happiness and unhappiness can be non-referential' (1999: 147). Moreover, while 'notions of enjoyment may be adequate for capturing many happy feelings, it seems much too tepid for the heights of rapture and bliss' (ibid). Sumner's insights are reflected in the discussion I offer in the following pages, which relates the notions of happiness, their temporality and fundamental mood or disposition of contentment. I try to deconstruct different forms of emotion and moods, and argue that subtleties in meaning are relevant to the development of happiness, well-being and utility. This is in opposition to Easterlin (2005), who sees no need to differentiate concepts that determine the way entities and events are disclosed to us.

The argument against desire satisfaction is not one that seeks asceticism or neglect of the value for money discourse that pervades much of higher education policy. Having an environment conducive to study, adequate resources and competent teaching are important, but these are contextual conditions, for the most part, relating to desire and wants that transverse the being in our world. Satisfaction of them does not enable learning or personal development (although they may contribute to short-term happiness). They are instrumental to, not the ends of, an educative process that is expressive of one's being; they are neither transformative nor ontologically significant; they are prudentially historic. In developing a theory of contentment that might act as an educative aim is not to replace desire satisfaction as an occurrent phenomenon of enjoyment, but to nurture the dispositional goal of contentment. To do this I need to turn to moods and emotions.

Moods

Moods are taken in the Heideggerian sense as the way we experience being part of our world and they set the way in which we interpret it. They are fundamental, and are more primordial than emotions. According to Ratcliffe, 'moods, for Heidegger, give sense to Dasein's world and to the manner in which Dasein finds itself relating to the world' (Ratcliffe, 2002). This distinguishes them from emotions, which have an intentionality, and are brief episodes with specific objects, whereas moods are longer-term states that either do not have objects or encompass a wide range of objects. Emotional states presuppose a world of background moods that make them possible (Ratcliffe, 2013). We have a number of fundamental moods that enable us to engage successfully (or otherwise) with our world and those within in it.⁴

Contentment

Contentment is not the happiness we might associate with, sensual desire satisfaction or, as Ahmed (2010) has illustrated, the happiness we are obliged to embrace but, following Heidegger, is a state of being content with oneself. Contentment in becoming what one wills one's being to be, in the knowledge of one's capabilities. It arises from the convergence of different emotions such as happiness, frustration and despair. The approach involves an educative process of developing potential capabilities and a realistic appreciation of what this means for one, being in the world with others. It is not fanciful and it denies that one can be whatever one fantasises; replacing this with a notion of contentment with what one might feasibly be (see Gibbs & Dean, 2014). To find our potential to be and to will its realisation requires the disruption of our tranquillity, and a heightened awareness and realisation of the core structural capabilities of critical thinking, confidence and citizenship. Securing these capabilities is emotionally unsettling, distressing and creates temporary negations to contentment but, in doing so—provided we experience them as part of our understanding of ourselves through attunement to the mood of contentment rather than anxiety—these capabilities bring benefits for individual growth.

This approach differs from the two main thrusts of literature concerned with happiness studies: well-being, leading to the Aristotelian *Phronimos* or the Confucian *Junzi*, and the desire hedonism of Epicurus and Mencius. It differs from judgements of well-being made retrospectively about an accumulation of satisfied lifelong desires, and from the explicit and normative directives of what is prudently good for one. In this sense, contentment is not strictly the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* that prioritises well-being based on moral, wealth or health imperatives, although it does retain notions of agentic directed growth, meaning and purpose informed by societal norms, whilst not being restricted to them. I can be content and virtuous, but I do not need to be virtuous to be content.⁵

Contentment's sustainable notion of happiness also differs from that of hedonism. In this respect it aligned with Edmund Burke's eighteenth century notion that pleasure should not be contrasted with pain for they are not negations of each other in that "removal of great pain does not resemble positive pleasure" (2015: 30) separated by indifference or tranquillity. Although it certainly finds a place for the presence of joy and momentary outbreaks of expression of delight and pleasure, it is not reliant on extrinsically directed and generated pleasures, and is an intrinsic state of awareness. Contentment, then, is a blend of both these traditional forms of happiness theory, realised through one's temporal being, and interpreted and understood from a mood of contentment with the living of a willed life plan

revealed through attunement. It is one's mood that becomes attuned to one's being within the consequences of one's agentic capabilities. It is being able to strive realistically to know the best one can be, and not the best anyone else might want one to be. It is not, as Haybron (2009: 147) suggests, an affirmation of one life but a revealing of the way one's life might be. It is not in the world, for nothing in and of itself holds a happiness quality,⁶ but in the way we interpret the world.

Significantly, for Heidegger, the affectiveness of our being 'has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to direct oneself towards something' (1962: 176). These fundamental attunements shape how we experience the world and things within it and, together with discourse and understanding, determine how we make ourselves meaningful and grasp our world (Heidegger calls this 'care'). The objects that the joy, happiness or sadness trigger are revealed because of a mood that determines the way of making one's way in the world. These outbursts last for the duration of the stimulus and, once gone, depending on our fundamental attunement, leave us somewhere between distress and contentment. However, we are not at the mercy of moods. Heidegger asserts that we 'should and must, through knowledge and will, become master of its moods; in certain possible ways of existing, this may signify a priority of volition and cognition' (1962: 175).

This structure of emotions and moods might have resonated with Shun's interpretation of the Confucian invulnerable ethical person. Here, the 'primacy of the ethical' (Shun, 2014) determines the way in which the world presents itself to the *Junzi*, not as a disruptive way of being in the world but as a way of being-in-the-world. It is a fundamental attunement to the contentment of the ethical. The invulnerability comes from taking a stance and living it, in the way of the ethical. Shun evokes Mencius' unmoved mind to establish this stance. Indeed, it could be suggested that the struggle to achieve such a position would see the contentment proposed here as invulnerable. However, this model of contentment allows for a less demanding form of resilience that might claim an ideological rather than an ethical state of mind. If allowed within a Confucian analysis, this type of contentment could be considered vulnerable. Such a distinction helps in allowing the notion of contentment to be a fundamental attunement to one's life, without requiring the practice of a *Phrónimos* or a *Junzi* to be contingent upon it.

Temporality of contentment

Moods, along with other aspects of care, are to be analysed in terms of temporality, according to Heidegger. The tripartite structure of time utilised (Gibbs, 2010) identifies

temporality of being in the world in three senses. In the first, ordinary time—the time of emotion—is calculative or experienced as a present extended in time, in external measurable time. In this state of temporal isolation our past and our future operate with ‘in-the-moment’ joy or despair. We risk violating our being if we do not reconnect with the primordial temporary of Care, the temporal form of contentment. The second form of temporality, world time, is spatial time, where events are located with respect to other events; not by their duration as measured in clock time but in terms of their temporal juxtaposition. Past, present and future all play a role in the location, but not the experience, of present time. Last, the temporality of mood (originary temporality) is that of the integration of past, present and future in the moment of being: ‘The primordial unity of the structure of care lies in temporality’ (Heidegger, 1962: 375). As Gibbs suggests, ‘all three modes of time are bound together degeneratively and dependently; ordinary time is a degenerative form of world time, and world time is a degenerative form of originary temporality’ (2010: 392).

Like Heidegger’s profound boredom, the phenomenon of contentment may take three distinctive forms, I suggest, reflecting their temporality. The first is emotional eruptions of joy, pleasure, gratification, bliss, lust or ecstasy, when there is a specific focus for the explicit show of happiness in an episodic fashion; a happiness directed towards something. The episodic emotions irrupt from propensity to any mood, although most likely from a disposition to find engagements happy (Haybron, 2009). The second manifestation of underlying happiness is a feeling akin to a shallow cheeriness without substance; a cheeriness or musing that is empty, not evoked by any specific external event but by a state of limbo, a temporal standing (Heidegger, 1995: 122). This might be called ‘whatever’ happiness. It is a satisfied state that is a reproduction of exciting norms of society and is specific to each epoch, currently consumerism. One smiles at a gift but assesses its financial worth rather than its meaning and regrets it is not different; laughs with others but is emotionally unmoved; and maintains an episodic cheerfulness and then wonders why.

The third is ontological and is an attunement to our own being’s happiness, the fundamental happiness of willing and then enacting one’s being. This is represented as contentment and revealed in one’s engagement with one’s being through taking a stance on fitting into that being, ‘being happily me’. Willing such a being is neither constant nor stable, but enduring. Normally, our attunements are appropriate to our willed becoming within the world of action and, if we become dysfunctional in our dominant way of dealing with the world we are not able to experience other appropriate attunements (anxiety) and emotions (fear). This is through a discourse; a hermeneutic reading of the world

foregrounded in our mood. Heidegger also maintains that modes of interpretation enabled by discourse may serve to determine the range of possible moods. Attunement creates an engagement with others and, in this sense, it is a ‘kinesthetic and emotional sensing of others knowing their rhythm, affect and experience’ (Erskine, 1998). As Heidegger observed, the effect is to create an atmosphere that can change the disposition of everyone in the vicinity.

Each of these three realisations of happiness is accompanied by a dominant notion of temporality (see Table 1).

Table 1: Contrasting forms of happiness⁷

	Directed happiness	‘Whatever’ happiness	Contentment
General distinction	Conspicuous expression of a happy emotional state of joy, bliss or ecstasy. A loss in the moment, anticipated present and then gone.	Inconspicuous occurrence of passing time, hidden from oneself and taken as a disposition—‘he is a cheery soul’. Directed at the public-ness of others.	An attunement to one’s existential being. A feeling of fitting with oneself regardless of others around one—informed contentment.
Notion of time	Datable time, that is, events located in relation to others. It is the shaping of separated notions of past, present and future.	Time is linear and progressive. It is the shaping of separated notions of past, present and future.	Originary or primordial time, the time in which we make sense of ourselves, temporality temporalised in the present.
Range of resonance	Being forced between particularly happy events.	Dissipation of happiness as a cheeriness throughout the whole situation.	Contentment with agentic being.
Happiness in relation to a situation	Bounded in a situation, limited by extrinsic circumstances.	Not bound to a particular situation, but a way of acting for others in their world.	All-embracing.

Contentment is the freedom of self-determination within the context of a chosen world view. Fundamental happiness, as distinct from episodic happiness—whether intense joy, eruptions of trivial pleasure or scrutinised notions of what is good for one—is not restricted to what others think and attempt to determine, but to one’s own stance. It is not the satisfaction of exciting preferences, but the securing of one’s action in a life plan of one’s being. This position allows for happiness to be cross-cultural and embraces faith as well as pragmatism, all in a non-economic stoic form of willed intention. It is about one’s fit within one’s being, so as to flourish in the world of, but not resolved by, others.

Soft and hard authenticity

The contentment envisioned here requires personal awareness and taking a stance on what is feasible for one to be, yet it requires neither virtuous living (although it might be aided by it), nor dependency on a joyous life after death, while it may include both. It is no easy task to will one's being, to take a stance on one's being, which is existentially sustainable and brings contentment. It is a role that higher education should facilitate through bringing an awareness of attunement to moods to its presentation of emotional as well as propositional knowledge. Understanding and interpreting one's potential to be within one's world requires education, vision, courage and tenacity. These are necessary if one is to ascertain how one's being fits best alongside others, without compromising one's being for the sake of merely fitting in for the fleeting benefit of others' comfort.

According to Heidegger, this process of taking a stance is the ownership of our own choices, and ownership leads to authenticity. These choices are dependent upon specifics open to each of us in our average, everyday existence. For Heidegger, *Dasein* should not be 'interpreted with the differentiated character [Differenz] of some definite way of existing, but that it should be uncovered' (1962: 69); it is not prescribed, but unfolds in how we engage with the world. In it revealed by being in the world and is a form of being that is a condition of one's socio-historical context. Guignon points to the constancy of this authenticity that leads to 'the "sober joy" of an authentic existence: when one seizes hold of one's life with deceive-ness and clarity' (Guignon, 1993: 233). Moreover, for Heidegger, making choices on one's being cannot be based solely on any external value judgement of what the authentic ought to be; neither is it a rejection of the inauthentic as a 'bad' way of being. Here, self-understanding implies a form of interpretation that is Heidegger's hermeneutic circle; it is ontological, not ethical—'our own Interpretation is purely ontological in its aims, and is far removed from any moralizing critique of everyday *Dasein*' (ibid: 211).

This soft interpretation of authenticity does not try to reject tradition, but seeks to understand the heritage of tradition in how these choices are revealed and made available. In this sense, eudemonic calls for personal well-being as some form of good variety of happiness is undertaken from the inauthentic position of authority, 'oppressing other diverse ways-of-being' (Trubody, 2015: 29). It is here that a value base of a worthy and moral state of authentic happiness differs from both the contentment proposed here and from the argument made by Chen (2013). In the former, a formalised notion of authenticity and happiness assumes external standards that one has to match—being excellent, being a better person, and so on. This is not my reading of Heidegger and it leads Trubody to talk

of a 'cult of the authentic' (2015). This authenticity is prescriptive in attributing value to authenticity, as opposed to inauthenticity, and sees contentment as poiesis. This distinguishes contentment from both equanimity - a state of emotional indifference and more associated with the second notion of happiness and tranquillity which is an isolation from being-with-others in the world; a form of personal alienation. Both remain as expression of are fundamental moods with tranquillity grounded in a fundamental emptiness (Heidegger 1995:162) and equanimity is a form of limbo where we are "interested neither in the object nor in the result of the activity, but in *being occupied as such* and in this alone. We are seeking to be occupied in any way. Why? Merely so as not to fall into this *being left empty*" (*ibid* 101).

For Heidegger, authenticity is embedded in 'das Man': our need to conform (at least in the development of a discourse) to the traditions and practices that make our world intelligible to us. If conformity becomes conformism, however, the need for conformity may also deprive us of any originality of purpose. Often, it is only when we are forced to question what we take as the way to be, for instance when inconspicuous acts reveal themselves in failure, that our conformity is revealed and we question our own stance and that of others. King has argued from a Heideggerian perspective that this corresponds to a sense of fitting in, in that 'we can ascribe fittingness to our lives (or elements of our lives, such as our careers, our family arrangements, or our desires and aspiration) when our lives are somehow appropriate to us' (2009: 10).

Contentment within Higher Education

Contentment, then, is necessarily neither a consequence of well-being nor suffering for some sense of eternal contentment after mortal life. It is about finding and knowing one's place in the world; fitting in through self-meaningful ways. It comes about by engagement and questioning, and requires the development of capabilities upon which these questions might be based and responses interpreted. Higher education, I propose, ought to give students the privileged space to pursue what they want themselves to be. By making this proposal I am asserting that a purpose of higher education must surely be the development of a criticality in students, both of the circumstances in which one finds oneself and of one's own action within these circumstances. Providing such a context for reflection ought to be a responsibility of higher education institutions, and taking such time to step aside from the totalising consumerism of our everydayness is the student's obligation to this gifted time. To misuse the privilege by busying oneself with what is, rather than what might be, I would suggest, is an abuse of privilege (see Gibbs, 2009). Indeed, many strive for it, and some

succeed, but it is not something higher education can gift. It requires personal engagement from students. I am not, of course, proposing that higher education ought to have no economic purpose, but that this has become an overpowering discourse. Nor am I suggesting that contentment is not evident in higher education, alongside satisfaction (although they are not the same thing (Gibbs & Dean, 2014)). Rather, contentment should be considered as a goal for higher education alongside other goals, to be set against the needs of the institution in measuring student satisfaction.

Education ought to provide an arena for the development of our potential and a place to be unsettled—unhappy, if you will—in the realisation that one has yet more to learn, and in this way to discuss the realistic potentials rather than any ungrounded imaginary choices about which one might fantasise. To do this, one must be in the ‘right mood’: a mood of contentment. In order to be plausible, the choices we make need to be adapted to and tested against personal circumstances, not to predetermine or to truncate options but to allow the development of feasible ways to plan to be. We need to evade the impositions of others’ moods and to learn to find for ourselves the right mood with which to replace them (Heidegger, 1962: 175). This can be unpleasant, creating short-term dissatisfaction. It may create a state of despairⁱ (see Roberts, 2013, 2016) from which we cannot find happiness either through solitude or immersed citizenship. Both can be facilitated by education, but neither can achieve it by a totalising type of public education that matters more to the state than the individual (accompanied by intense surveillance), or a solitary kind of study that renders one isolated in a world of social activity to the extent that it renders real solitude impossible. Where this analysis leads us is to consider that discomfort is fearful only when it is interpreted as such from an attunement to anxiety; and, since moods constitute the way in which things matter to us, if we change the mood we change the way they matter.

Moreover, if we crudely follow Rorty (1999) in that higher education’s duty is to encourage irony from the socialisation of compulsory education, then higher education and its institutions represent a space for this questioning to take place. Further, it might be claimed that higher education has a duty to offer such a space and not to close it out with the business of service delivery based on pleasure, entertainment and job grooming. It is in the Heideggerian sense of a fundamental attunement⁸ to the world through the mood of contentment that we find ourselves disposed to be in the world with others; open to them and not constrained by the consumerism entrapment of a notion of belonging by consuming. Heidegger talks damningly and directly about how consumerism is abandoning Being through letting one’s ‘will be unconditionally equated with the process

[consumerism] and thus becomes at the same time the “object” of the abandonment of Being’ (1973: 107, author’s brackets). He continues in a prophetic attack on consumerism as the totalising power, held by a few globalised leaders, to negate our understanding of our being: the ‘circularity of consumption for the sake of consumption is the sole procedure which distinctively characterizes the history of a world which has become an unworld’ (1973: 107).

For example, if learning is consumption and consuming is a never-ending requirement of consumerism, then failing to learn fast is a failure of consumption and to be feared. However, if failure to learn quickly reveals issues about oneself that can be explored over time, it might bring deeper understanding or even acceptance that something is personally unlearn-able. Either way, one is content with the educational struggle when one accepts its reality. Such contentment does not seek an end to learning. It is a moving and ceaseless state of learning, ready to face the unanticipated future resolutely as oneself.

It is a mode of practice where the poles of action and holding back form a mode of disclosing and affirming within oneself what is understood to be practised. Such disclosing is through our attunement to a mood. When this is contentment, it brings a sense of hope (Rorty, 1999). To manage this issue requires thinking about what education is intent in doing for ‘true happiness consists in decreasing the difference between our desires and our powers, in establishing a perfect equilibrium between power and the will’ (Rousseau, 2013: 39).

Rather than an economic acquisition agenda that has resulted in practices that deny students potentially valuable educational experiences, a university should challenge students to develop the capabilities to optimise their potential to make responsible, or at least informed, choices. This may often be achieved through more space in the curriculum to ‘potter about’, to follow the byways of their curiosity and not worry about learning outcomes or assessment criteria. These are designed to fill up time, to create the urgency of immediate demand and to induce a fear of forgetting who you are. Such adventures may often be painfully uncomfortable yet, in and of itself, this does not diminish the mood of contentment but strengthens students’ resolve and resilience to create a personal identity within the context of being a member of society. As Heidegger claims, ‘real education lays hold of the soul itself and transforms it in its entirety by first of all leading us to the place of our essential being and accustoming us to it’ (1998: 167).

How, then, should higher education provide an educative environment for the development of contentment in the face of the anxiety of consumer demands? It first needs to take its own stance on what is an edifying experience—one where the economic

imperative of improved human capital is not allowed to become a quest to make learning merely pleasurable, painless and easy to consume. For Heidegger, teaching and learning, or putting 'oneself on a journey, to experience, means to learn' (1971: 143). The teaching of philosophy as exemplified by the Socratic dialogues with Theaetetus is a good example, as is the contemporary teaching of literature and drama through which students become engaged with human contexts and emotions. Learning is about thinking about and addressing that which confronts us and may be painful, frustrating and negative. It is about dealing with the world and being prepared to act. Education should not be to hide the uncomfortable or the despair of unrealisable goals behind a neoliberal imperative of consumerism, and breaking away from this enframement of the anxiety supports and embraces an openness to the world. An attunement to contentment rather than anxiety applies, of course, to staff as well as students, in order that what truly matters in education may be revealed.

This could lead to pedagogy of contentment which should be radical, at the centre of higher education as a social good and should enable and facilitate students taking a stance on their being and their agency with others develop through engagement with societal problems. It is where the confluence of ideas, cultures and powers determine action both within and external to the educational institution. Faced with the realities of sustainability such a pedagogy has its core experiential learning through action. It will develop both contentment within themselves and resilience to engage with the world of work and civic responsibility and face despair positively. A pedagogy of contentment is not about passivity but awareness and engagement with others to seek a better place to live. It is liberal in the sense of wide ranging and transdisciplinary in seeks engagement with pressing societal problems without the constraint of disciplines but with the insight that they offer. At the core of a pedagogy of contentment is knowing one's place in the world and understanding the despair of failure, struggle and elation of achievement and balances these in a personal attunement to the world.

Roberts suggests that to be 'educated is, in part, to be aware of one's despair, accepting of it, and able to work productively with it' (2013: 464)⁹. This, I argue, is not found in an attunement of anxiety where notions of desire satisfaction are directed at education, but in a pre-existing mood of contentment, where things that matter are not viewed as fearful or fearless. Rather, they are viewed as contributing, either positively or negatively, to one's explored sense of being oneself open to, but not enslaved by, others. This, I believe, is at the core of the common good that many still suggest is a function of higher education.

Notes

- ¹ Following Ratcliffe, ‘attunement’ is chosen as a translation of Heidegger’s use of *Befindlichkeit*. Alternatives include ‘state of mind’, as used by Macquarrie and Robinson (Heidegger, 1962), but this implies that moods constitute a sense of being part of a world, rather than pre-subjective and pre-objective.
- ² Bauman (2007) links the two by claiming that assuaging boredom is a measure of a happy life. I make no such claim.
- ³ Heidegger alludes to a number of profound moods and develops an analysis of two; anxiety (in *Being and Time*), and boredom in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*. It is in the *Metaphysics* that Heidegger talks of a range of fundamental moods, but does not pursue more than boredom.
- ⁴ There is a potential linkage with the notion of xi喜, le樂 and you憂, as discussed by Shun (2014).
- ⁵ This is opposite to Rousseau who, in his letter to D’Offreville (Gourevitch, 1997), wrote that you can only be content if you are honest, yet you can be honest and not content, and is supported by Tatarkiewicz’ analysis (1976).
- ⁶ Similar can be found in Kraut’s *Against Absolute Goodness* (2011).
- ⁷ Evidence to support the temporal and emotional structures of happiness and contentment can be found in recent works in the study of happiness (e.g. Diener, 1984; Shmotkin, 2005). They differ from Heidegger mainly in the temporal modes of a distinct past, present and future. While they do not reflect his notion of being’s fundamental attunement, realised in a state of ‘originary’ or primordial temporality, they accord with the notion of contentment as an enduring temporal notion. Şimşek (2009) has proposed a construct of subjective well-being as ‘one’s evaluation of life in both past and future time perspectives in addition to the present’ (2009: 505), and as a life project created and maintained in a temporal perspective (Simsek and Kocayörük, 2012). By evoking Heidegger, Simsek (2009) argues that time, ‘when considered as a basic ontological category, transforms the concept of “life as a personal project” into one more abstract: “life as a project of becoming”, which is the chief good as the indicator of a happy life’ (ibid: 511).
- ⁸ ‘It is clear that attunements are not something merely at hand. They themselves are precisely a fundamental manner and fundamental way of being, indeed of being-there [Da-sein], and this always directly includes being with one another’ (Heidegger, 1995: 67).
- ⁹ As Roberts comments here has been surprisingly little philosophical work on the significance of despair in educational life. Notable exceptions include that of Liston (2000), who speaks not of student despair but of that of teachers. However, rather than wishing to destroy this despair, he accepts that it is not a matter of an individual’s unmet needs and expectations—it is part of the structure of teaching. He links it to the vulnerability of teaching as a public sharing of our personal love of learning. A different conception is provided by McKnight (2004), Nielsen (2006) and Roberts (2013, 2016) who, through the existential lens of Kierkegaard, see dialectic as an educational process that unveils self-discourse as ethical discourse. Indeed, Kierkegaard’s work features in much of the limited literature

References

- Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham, DC: Duke University Press.
- Aristotle. (1984). *Metaphysics*, Book IX. In *Complete Works of Aristotle* (W. D. Ross, Trans., pp. 1651–1661). New York: Princeton University Press.

- Augustine of Hippo. (2010). The happy life. In *Trilogy on faith and happiness* (R. Teske, M. Campbell & R. Kearney, Trans., pp. 23–54). New York, NY: New York City Press.
- Bauman, Z. (2007). Collateral causalities of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 7, 25–56.
- Burke E 2015, *A Philosophical Enquiry into sublime and Beautiful*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Chen, X. (2013). Happiness and authenticity: Confucianism and Heidegger. *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 38, 261–274.
- Dearden, R. F. (1968). Happiness and education. *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, 2, 1, 17–29.
- Davis, W. (1981). A theory of happiness. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 18, 2, 111–120.
- Dewey, J. (1966). *Democracy and education*. New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Dewey, J. (2012). *Ethics*. London: Forgotten Books.
- Diener, E. (1984). Subjective well-being. *Psychological Bulletin*, 95, 542–575.
- Easterlin, R. A. (2005). Building a better theory of well-being. In L. Bruni & P. Porta, L. (Eds), *Economics and happiness: Framing the analysis* (pp. 29–64). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Epicurus (2013). *The art of happiness*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Erskine, R. G. (1998). Attunement and involvement: Therapeutic responses to relational needs. *International Journal of Psychotherapy*, 3, 3, 231–234.
- Feldman, F. (2012). *What is this thing called happiness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Gibbs, P. (2009). Adopting consumer time. *Potential Issues for Higher Education*, 7 (2), 113–24.
- Gibbs, P. (2010). Heidegger, time, work, and the challenges for higher education. *Time and Society*, 19, 939, 387–403.
- Gibbs, P. & Dean, A. (2014). Troubling the notion of satisfied students. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 68, 4, 416–431.
- Gourevitch, V. (Ed.) (1997). *Rousseau: The social contract and other later political writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Greve, B. (2012). *Happiness*. London: Routledge.
- Griffin, J. (1988). *Well-being*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Guignon, C. B. (1993). Authenticity. Moral values and psychotherapy. In B. C. Guignon (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Heidegger* (pp. 215–239). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Haybron, D. (2009). *The pursuit of unhappiness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. (1971). *On the way to language*. (P. D. Hertz, Trans.). San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row.
- Heidegger, M. (1973). Overcoming metaphysics. In *The end of philosophy* (J. Stambaugh, Trans.). New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, M. (1995). *The fundamental concepts of metaphysics*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1998). Plato's Doctrine of Truth. In W. McNeill (Ed.), *Pathways* (pp. 155–182). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- King, M. (2009). Heidegger and happiness. London: Continuum.
- Kraut, R. (2011). Against absolute goodness. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Liston, D., (2000) Love and Despair in Teaching. *Educational Theory*, 50 (1), 81-102, 2000.
- McKnight, D., Kierkegaard and the Despair of the Aesthetic Existence in Teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 20 (1), 59-80, 2004
- Mill, J. S. (2008). Utilitarianism. In *On liberty and other essays* (pp. 5131–204). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nielsen, K.(2006) The Negativistic Process of Education. *Nordic Psychology*, 58 (3), 183-195,
- Noddings, N. (2003). Happiness and education. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ratcliffe, M. (2002). Heidegger's attunement and the neuropsychology of emotion. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 1, 287–312.
- Ratcliffe, M. (2010). The phenomenology of mood and the meaning of life. In P. Goldie (Ed.), *Oxford handbook of philosophy of emotion*, pp. 349–371. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ratcliffe, M. (2013). Why mood matters. In M. A. Wrathall (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Heidegger's being and time* (pp. 157–174). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
- Roberts, P. (2013). Happiness, despair and education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, 32, 463–475.
- Roberts, P., *Happiness, Hope and Despair*. New York: Peter Lang, 2016.
- Rorty, R. (1999). Philosophy and social hope. London: Penguin.
- Rousseau, J.-J. (2013). *Emile* (B. Foxley, Trans.). New York, NY: Topbooks.
- Russell, B. (2006). The conquest of happiness. London: Routledge Classics.
- Shmotkin, D. (2005). Happiness in the face of adversity: Reformulating the dynamic and modular bases of subjective well-being. *Review of General Psychology*, 9, 4, 291–325.
- Shun, Kwong-loi. (2014). On reflective equanimity—A Confucian perspective. In Li Chenyang and Ni Peimin (Eds), *Moral cultivation and Confucian character: Engaging Joel J. Kupperman*. New York, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Simsek, Ö. F. (2009). Happiness revisited: Ontological well-being as a theory-based construct of subjective well-being. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 10, 505–522.
- Simsek, Ö. F. and Kocayörük, E. 2012. Affective reactions to one's whole life: Preliminary development and validation of the ontological well-being scale. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, May, 1–35.
- Standish, P., Smeyers, P. & Smith, R. (2006). The therapy of education: Philosophy, happiness and personal growth. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sumner, L. W. (1999). Welfare, happiness and ethics, Oxford: Clarendon Press,
- Tatarkiewicz, W. (1976). Analysis of happiness. Melbourne International Philosophy Series. Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Trubody, B. (2015). Heidegger, education and the 'cult of the authentic'. *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, 49, 1, 14–23.

- Vela, J. C., Castro, V., Cavazos, L., Cavazos, M. & Gonzalez, S. L. (2015). Understanding Latina students' meaning in life, spirituality, and subjective happiness. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 14, 2, 171–184.
- White, J. (2012). *Aims of education restated*. London: Routledge.
-